

Republicans Give Trump the Green Light for a Border Wall Emergency Declaration

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[They aren't fans of the idea. But they signaled this week that they won't raise a stink if Trump does it.](#)

Everyone in Congress agrees that government shutdowns are bad and shouldn't happen again. Figuring out how to actually end them is a different story.

A bipartisan campaign to pass legislation that would effectively prevent shutdowns seemed to pick up momentum last week after [Speaker Nancy Pelosi \(D-CA\) embraced the idea](#) and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) [did so](#) too. But days after Pelosi's quasi-endorsement, progress has stalled after influential members of her own party argued that the bills being considered would cripple their power and actually serve as a back-door mechanism for Republicans to reduce government spending.

Each of the "shutdown-ending" bills being advanced by Republicans and Democrats in both chambers have one thing in common: in the event that Congress can't agree on new government funding legislation, an automatic "continuing resolution" would kick in to fund the government at existing spending levels. Such an idea seemed appealing as Congress ended the longest shutdown in U.S. history last week and as it stares down the possibility of another shutdown in just a few weeks. But within days, veteran lawmakers began to issue warnings.

Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY), who chairs the House Appropriations Committee, said on Tuesday that she won't back any bill that triggers automatic funding levels for fear that it would leave the government on "indefinite autopilot." She argued that the bills to end government shutdowns would institute sweeping changes to the legislative process that could result in "serious unintended consequences."

Lowey is a high-profile lawmaker whose committee would consider any of the shutdown-ending proposals, but her skepticism all but kills the prospect of such bills passing through the House. And she's not the only Democrat who isn't enamored with the idea. The number two House Democrat, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD), also gave a thumbs-down to bills with automatic continuing resolutions, calling it a bad way to govern.

Progressive Democrats on Tuesday outlined some of the "unintended consequences" that they fear could result from approving any of the shutdown-ending bills. Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA), co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said she worried the bills would compel lawmakers not to compromise during a shutdown, especially one that took place during a transfer of power.

“I know there’s an intent to try to prevent government shutdowns, but we have to be careful about how we do that and not lock in something that’s even worse, or incentives for us never to come to new budgets on things,” she said.

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Hill Democrats also expressed fear about the specifics of the legislation under consideration. Members said that any bill that merely kept existing levels of spending intact in light of a failure to reach a larger funding deal would essentially amount to a spending cut if not adjusted for inflation.

“Republicans would love to let discretionary spending be on an automatic [continuing resolution],” said a House Democratic aide.

In reality, the House Democratic aide may have been optimistic. While Republicans have called for legislation to end government shutdowns, the bill that two dozen GOP senators have co-sponsored would institute successive, automatic across-the-board spending cuts the longer that Congress fails to pass a new spending bill. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH), who has spearheaded that bill, has argued that the automatic cuts would be an incentive for both sides to come to a deal.

With each side wary of the other’s proposal to effectively prevent future shutdowns, moderate Democrats warned that inaction on this front would keep federal workers vulnerable to the punishing effects of another shutdown. On Tuesday, a group of Democratic freshmen—most of whom flipped districts held by Republicans—introduced legislation that would put in place increasingly harsh penalties on the legislative and executive branches if they prove unable to reach a spending agreement, including lost pay and mandatory daily meetings in Congress to work out their differences.

Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D-MI), a freshman who unseated an incumbent Republican in a district won by Donald Trump in 2016, dismissed her fellow Democrats’ concerns over their legislation as “parochial.”

“I think it’s just a matter of, are we listening to voices inside the Beltway, or are we listening to people on the ground?” Slotkin said.

As they bickered over the specifics of substantive legislation, Congress fell into finger-pointing on Wednesday over what is usually one of the chamber’s easiest tasks: passing a symbolic resolution expressing “the sense of the House.”

Democrats, led by Hoyer, pushed a resolution that government shutdowns are “detrimental” and should be prevented. Thanks to a dust-up over initial language that blamed shutdowns on Trump and the GOP, the show of unity fell apart and the resolution, which needed two-thirds of the vote in the House to pass, failed.